

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 ICAE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 /029 W

-----040616 241614Z /53

O 251504Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8085

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL KADUNA IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINR, PGOV, NI

SUBJECT: STUDENT STRIKE: A NOISY WEEKEND

REF: LAGOS 5035

1. SUMMARY: THE WEEKEND WAS MARKED BY RHETORIC RATHER THAN ACTION ON THE STUDENT FRONT. WHILE PUBLIC STATEMENTS HAVE DONE LITTLE TO CALM THE CURRENT SITUATION, THE CLOSURE OF FOUR UNIVERSITIES SHOULD EASE TENSIONS. THE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT THE NATIONAL UNION OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS (NUNS) HAD BEEN BANNED, BUT THE PRESIDENT OF NUNS REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE BAN. PRESS CALLS FOR A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY, AND IN ONE CASE FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, HAVE REAFFIRMED GENERAL UNHAPPINESS WITH POLICE HANDLING OF THE SITUATION. IT IS UNCLEAR AT THIS TIME WHAT THE NEXT STEPS WILL BE IN THE CRISIS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE WEEKEND OF APRIL 22-23 WAS MARKED BY RHETORIC BUT LITTLE ACTION IN THE STUDENT STRIKE.

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FRIDAY NIGHT, APRIL 21, COLONEL ALI, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, ISSUED A STRONGLY WORDED STATEMENT ANNOUNCING THE CLOSURE OF THREE UNIVERSITIES WHICH WERE ALREADY CLOSE -- AHMADU BELLO, IBADAN AND LAGOS -- AND THE BANNING OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS (NUNS). IN HIS STATEMENT ALI NOTED VARIOUS STUDENT ACTIONS

INCLUDING THE "HARASSMENT OF INNOCENT PERSONS OUTSIDE THE CAMPUSES", BLOCKING OF ROADS, ATTACKS ON POLICEMEN, "KIDNAPPING OF POLICEMEN," THEFT OF A RIFLE AND AMMUNITION, AND EVALUATED THE SITUATION AS FOLLOWS: "IT IS CLEAR THAT IN THE COURSE OF THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS, THE STUDENTS SET OUT DELIBERATELY TO PROVOKE THE POLICE, TO DESTROY THEIR VEHICLES AND IN SOME CASES TO RANSACK POLICE POSTS WITHIN UNIVERSITY PREMISES IN SEARCH OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION." HE CONCLUDED THAT, "THE FEDERAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT CANNOT TOLERATE THIS RAPIDLY DETERIORATING SITUATION IN THE UNIVERSITIES..." RE THE BANNING OF NUNS HE CHARGED THAT THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIONS WOULD NOT HAVE RESULTED IN "THE DETERIORATION IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE UNIVERSITIES" IF NUNS HAD NOT "DECIDED TO ORGANIZE A CONFRONTATION WITH THE AUTHORITIES". HE CONCLUDED THAT "IT WILL BE UNLAWFUL FOR STUDENTS TO BELONG TO NUNS. ONLY INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNIONS CAN DEAL WITH THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES ON STUDENTS' UNION MATTERS."

3. SEGUN OKEOWO, PRESIDENT OF NUNS, RESPONDED THAT THE ORGANIZATION WOULD CONTINUE AND THAT HE WOULD OCCUPY HIS SEAT IN THE CONSTITUENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ASSEMBLY AS NUNS PRESIDENT. HE ALSO STATED CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE STUDENT CRISIS COULD BE SETTLED:
--THE BAN ON NUNS BE LIFTED IMMEDIATELY.
--A PUBLIC INQUIRY SHOULD BE INSTITUTED ON THE CLASHES AND ADEQUATE COMPENSATION PAID TO THE FAMILIES OF BEREAVED STUDENTS.
--ALL UNIVERSITIES CLOSED DOWN AS A RESULT OF THE CLASHES BE REOPENED IMMEDIATELY.

4. OKEOWO STATED THAT UNLESS THOSE DEMANDS WERE MET THE STUDENTS WOULD NOT ATTEND ANY MEETING TO SETTLE THE CURRENT CRISIS. HE ALSO DESCRIBED COLONEL ALI'S STATEMENT AS "NAIVE AND PETTY". CHARGING THAT THE COMMISSIONER HAD "WRECKED EDUCATIONAL POLICY" IN THE COUNTRY, AND CALLED FOR HIS RESIGNATION.

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5. STATEMENTS BY OTHERS HAVE DONE LITTLE TO CALM THE SITUATION. THE VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IFE IN ANNOUNCING THE CLOSURE OF THAT SCHOOL CHARGED, "THE CRISIS NEED NOT HAVE DEGENERATED INTO SUCH AN UGLY SITUATION WITHOUT THE EXCESSIVE DEMONSTRATION OF FORCE BY THE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES." HE ADDED THAT THE EFFORTS TO BRING PEACE HAD NOT BEEN HELPED BY THE SPORADIC ACTION OF MINORITY GROUPS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY. A SPOKESMAN FOR "POOR MOTHERS OF STUDENTS" ALSO ANNOUNCED A GROUP OF WOMEN WHO RANGE IN AGES FROM 60-70 YEARS WOULD "WALK NAKED" TO DODAN BARRACKS ON WEDNESDAY TO PROTEST THE "INCONSIDERATE AND UNWELCOME ACTION" OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION IN RAISING FEES.

6. PROFESSOR WOLE SOYINKA OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IFE AND ONE OF NIGERIA'S BEST KNOWN WRITERS RESIGNED AS SPECIAL MARSHAL OF THE OYO STATE ROAD SAFETY CORPS IN PROTEST AGAINST "THE KILLING OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS BY ARMED MEN IN UNIFORM." SOYINKA CONDEMNED THE STUDENT DEATHS AS A "A HIDEOUS CRIME" AND STAGED A ONE-MAN DEMONSTRATION AT

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VARIOUS SITES IN ILE-IFE FRIDAY CARRYING A PLACARD SAYING "FIRST IBADAN, NOW LAGOS, BENIN, ZARIA. WHERE NEXT? STOP STUDENT MURDER."

7. PRESS COMMENTARY WAS GENERALLY CRITICAL OF THE POLICE AND CALLED FOR A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO INVESTIGATE THE SITUATION WHICH RESULTED IN THE DEATHS OF STUDENTS. THE APRIL 22 DAILY TIMES CALLED FOR THE REMOVAL OF COL. ALI, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, SAYING, "HIS REMOVAL....WILL NOT BRING A DEAD STUDENT BACK TO LIFE. BUT IT WILL BRING TO THE MINISTRY A COMMISSIONER MORE SENSITIVE, RATIONAL AND LESS ALOOF."

8. COMMENT: IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT THE NEXT STAGE IN THE STUDENT PROBLEM. THE DISPERSAL OF STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITIES WHERE MAJOR CONFRONTATIONS TOOK PLACE SHOULD EASE THE PROBLEM. WE KNOW FROM AN INCREASING NUMBER OF REPORTS THAT STUDENTS IN A NUMBER OF UNIVERSITIES WERE OPPOSED TO THE BOYCOTT OF CLASSES AND THERE WAS VIOLENCE AMONG STUDENTS WHEN NUNS REPRESENTATIVES ATTEMPTED TO ENFORCE THE BOYCOTT. WHETHER NUNS HAS THE STRENGTH TO CONTINUE TO MOUNT ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTION IN THIS SITUATION REMAINS TO BE SEEN. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE BEST COURSE FOR THE FMG IS TO APPOINT A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO REVIEW THE TRAGIC EVENTS OF LAST WEEK. THIS SHOULD SERVE TO DEFUSE PUBLIC CONCERN FOR THE MOMENT. THE FMG MUST ALSO BE GIVING SERIOUS THOUGHT TO WHETHER COL. ALI SHOULD BE SACRIFICED TO APPEASE PUBLIC COMPLAINTS.

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Message Attributes

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